

Benicia

State Recreation Area



Our Mission

The mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



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CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

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Discover the many states of California.™

Benicia State Recreation Area

1 State Park Road

Benicia, CA 94510

(707) 648-1911

*The tidal marsh—where
the rivers meet the bay—
forms a unique habitat,
home to rare
and endangered
plants and wildlife.*



The combined waters of fourteen tributaries of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers surge through the Carquinez Strait, past Benicia State Recreation Area, and west into San Pablo Bay on their way to the Pacific Ocean.

Over the past 150 years, these waters have carried silt and clay from the hydraulic gold mines and timber logging sites of the Sierra and deposited the particles where fresh water meets salt water at Southampton Bay. The mudflat and marsh make up most of the recreation area, providing habitat for some unusual and endangered species.

The climate is generally windy and cool year-round, with frequent fog. Temperatures range from 40 to 101 degrees, with average rainfall of 3 inches during winter months.

PARK HISTORY

Native Americans

Today's Solano County was first settled by the Patwin, who spoke the Southern Wintuan language. Historians estimate that about 3,300 Southern Patwin lived in the area before European encroachment.

From 1800 through the 1820s, Spanish padres from Mission Dolores, Mission San José and the mission at Sonoma tried to convert the Southern Patwin to Catholicism. After the mission era ended

in 1834, Mexican commandant General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo used these new converts, called neophytes, as a labor force to work on his vast land holdings—nearly 175,000 acres.

A century later, only about 200 Patwin were left—lost to forced labor, deprivation and newly introduced European diseases.

Euro-American Settlement

The city of Benicia was founded in 1847 by General Vallejo, Dr. Robert Semple and Thomas O. Larkin. Benicia was originally named “Francisca” in honor of Vallejo's wife, Doña Francisca Benicia Carrillo.

Francisca's founders changed the town's name to Benicia on June 12, 1847, after nearby Yerba Buena was officially renamed San Francisco. With its strategic location skirting Southampton Bay and the Carquinez Strait, Benicia built the area's first deep-water harbor capable of docking large ships.

Park Property

The sandstone point at Benicia SRA has been known as Rocky Point, Quarry Point and now Dillon Point. Stonecutter Patrick Dillon came to California from Tipperary, Ireland, during the 1849 gold rush. He settled in Benicia in 1851. General Vallejo leased Dillon the tidal flat at Southampton Bay and Rocky Point peninsula for a sandstone quarry.



*Doña Francisca Benicia
Carrillo de Vallejo*

Dillon eventually purchased the property; he built a brick kiln and began making red clay bricks. Sandstone and raw materials for the bricks were eventually exhausted. The Dillon family and subsequent owners tried sheep ranching and raising grapes until the State acquired the property for Benicia State Recreation Area in 1967.

NATURAL HISTORY

Geology and Habitat

Nearly 70 percent of the parkland is tidal marsh wetland, ringed by grassy hills and open water. The Southampton mudflat formed by upriver silt and clay deposits is over 1,000 feet thick. The principal habitats here are brackish marsh, saltwater marsh and freshwater marsh.

Plants and Wildlife

This rare and endangered wetland ecosystem is covered with marsh plants such as salt grass, pickleweed, coyote bush and soft bird's-beak. Bird's-beak is an endangered gray-green annual herb in the snapdragon family. Non-native trees provide light shade at the park entrance and picnic table areas. Native plant communities such as chaparral, valley grassland and coastal scrub bloom on the hillsides.

Native Plant Botanic Garden

The Forrest Deaner Native Plant Botanic Garden represents over 250 species on 3.5 acres overlooking Southamptton Bay.

The garden pays tribute to the late Forrest Deaner, founder of the Willis Linn Jepson Chapter (Solano County) of the California Native Plant Society. In spring, colorful magenta redbuds, golden poppies, blue lupines and pink-flowered currants bloom. Summer and early fall deepen native plant foliage into russets and browns.

Several demonstration gardens—Memorial, Residential/Sensory, Native American, Butterfly/Hummingbird, Wildflower Meadow and Riparian—display flora varieties, each marked with different colored labels. The Botanic Garden is fully maintained by volunteers and funded through grants and individual donations. For more information, visit www.cnpsjepsonchapter.org.

Wildlife

Endangered northern salt marsh harvest mice depend on the park's pickleweed for its dense cover. Marsh erosion, predators and severe habitat loss have reduced this mouse population. Other park mammals include coyote, beaver, otter and muskrat. Marine birds float lazily on thermal updrafts at this designated Important Bird Area, which provides essential



Salt marsh harvest mouse in pickleweed

habitat for bird species. Virginia rails, endangered California clapper rails and black rails hide in marsh vegetation. Visitors may see herons and egrets fishing or pelicans and terns diving. The marsh resounds with Suisun song sparrows and saltmarsh common yellowthroat. On their journey along the Pacific Flyway, many waterfowl winter in the park, such as Canada geese or canvasback and goldeneye ducks.

RECREATION

Dogs and bicycles are allowed on the Benicia Bay Trail, part of the Bay Area Ridge Trail. California State Parks built the Benicia Bay Trail in collaboration with the Bay Area Ridge Trail Coalition and the San Francisco Bay Trail Foundation.

The park has 2.25 miles of paved road and bike paths. The Hike and Bike Trail—two parallel, paved, accessible trails—begins at the Military West entrance and runs 0.75 miles to the main park entrance, joining Dillon Point Road for 1.5 miles.

Dillon Point offers prime shore fishing for sturgeon, starry flounder and striped bass. Anglers over age 16 must carry a valid California fishing license.



Sweeping marsh and bay views

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

The Benicia Bay Trail is a 2.2-mile, accessibly designed scenic trail in gently rolling hills. A few slopes exceed 8% grade, followed by rest areas. Accessible benches dot the trail at intervals. The trailhead, picnic tables and parking are accessible; they are near the group picnic area, a mile into the park. A portable restroom at Military West is designated accessible. For updates, see www.access.parks.ca.gov.

PLEASE REMEMBER

- Park is open from 8 a.m. to sunset daily.
- Pay the day-use vehicle fee at entrance.
- Dogs must be on a leash. Dogs and bikes are not allowed on marsh nature trails.
- Tent camping is not permitted. For a fee, RVs may camp *en route* for one night, space permitting, near the park entrance.

NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Benicia Capitol State Historic Park
115 West G St., Benicia (707) 745-3385
- Sonoma State Historic Park
363-3rd Street West (at the Mission)
Sonoma (707) 938-9560

This park receives support in part from the nonprofit Benicia State Parks Association,
115 West G St., Benicia, CA 94510
(707) 745-3385

to Vallejo

Legend

- | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|--|---------------------|
| | Freeway | | Nature Trail |
| | Major Road | | No Bicycles Allowed |
| | Paved Road | | No Dogs Allowed |
| | Unpaved Trail | | Parking |
| | Paved Trail | | Picnic Area |
| | Accessible Trail | | Restrooms |
| | Intermittent Stream | | Viewpoint |
| | Natural Preserve | | |
| | Garden Area | | |
| | Accessible Feature | | |
| | Bicycle Trail | | |
| | Dogs Allowed on Leash | | |
| | Fishing | | |
| | Hiking | | |
| | Marsh Area | | |

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